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FUNDAMENTALS OF METHODISM





# Fundamentals of Methodism

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By EDWIN D. MOUZON

One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South

"The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort. His assenting to this or that scheme of religion, his embracing any particular set of notions, his espousing the judgment of one man or of another are all quite wide of the point. Whosoever, therefore, imagines that a Methodist is a man of such or such an opinion is grossly ignorant of the whole affair; he mistakes the truth totally. We believe, indeed, that 'all scripture is given by inspiration of God'; and herein we are distinguished from Jews, Turks, and infidels. We believe the written word of God to be the only rule both of faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Romish Church. We believe Christ to be the eternal, the supreme God; and herein we are distinguished from the Socinians and Arians. But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think. So that, whatsoever they are, whether right or wrong, they are no distinguishing marks of a Methodist."—John Wesley, in *"The Character of a Methodist."*

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To  
*All Who Are Interested in Keeping Alive in the World  
That Spiritual Interpretation of Christianity Which  
God Gave through John Wesley,  
This Book Is Dedicated.*





## INTRODUCTION

DURING the summer of the present year I passed through the Church press a series of articles on the Fundamentals of Methodism. It soon became evident that these articles were both too long and too short. They were too long for the average Church paper and in some instances had to be printed piecemeal, thus destroying their unity and leading to some misapprehension as to their purpose. They were also too short for an adequate discussion of the facts and principles which they sought to set forth and explain. In more than one case I found myself under the necessity of leaving out matter which should have been presented in order to keep to the front teachings of importance in any well-balanced presentation of Methodist Fundamentals. But even with such handicaps as these, there is reason to believe that the publication of my exposition of Methodism has accomplished good. In response, therefore, to many requests which have come from all parts of the Church, I have gathered these articles together and have considerably enlarged them. It will be seen that the discussion of the Fundamental Belief of Methodism takes a much wider range. This, because of its brevity and its lack of balance, was to the writer the least satisfactory of all the articles as originally printed.

I am seeking to make plain to laymen as well as to preachers just what the Fundamentals of Methodism are. These are presented in this book in three chapters:

- I. Fundamental Belief.
- II. Fundamental Practice.
- III. Fundamental Experience.

I am also printing in the "Addenda" Methodism's three great historic documents, the Apostles' Creed, the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion, and the General Rules of the United Societies. The reader will thus be under no

necessity of referring to his Discipline to find these documents, but will have them before him for immediate reference and study.

For the sake of emphasis the discussion of the Fundamental Experience, out of which Methodism came, is presented last. But it should never be forgotten that without that Experience of Personal Salvation there would never have been any Methodist Church in the world. As in the history covered by the New Testament, so in the genesis and growth of Methodism, the true order is: First, *experience* and a *holy life*, and then *Christian doctrine*. Doctrine grows out of experience and life. Men are not first theologians and then Christians. They are first Christians, and after that they begin to meditate on the significance of the things which they have felt and seen. The great truths of religion are not, first of all, truths of the head and afterwards truths of the heart. First of all, they are truths of experience, and later they become truths of the intellect. The failure to see and understand this leads to vast misunderstanding. It is the peculiar glory of Methodism that we have seen and proclaimed this gospel of Christian experience from the days of John Wesley until now. If Methodism is to remain true to type, we must continue to lay stress where Wesley and his associates put their emphasis—namely, on Christian experience and holy living.

It should go without saying that the writer of the following pages is not a "Fundamentalist." Neither is he a "Liberal" in the sense in which that word has come to be used. I agree fully with Horace Bushnell that "Liberality loosens the terms of truth; permitting easily and with careless magnanimity variations from it, consenting to overlook and allow them, and subsiding thus ere long into a licentious indifference to all truth and a general defect of responsibility in regard to it." No, the writer is neither a "Fundamentalist" nor a "Lib-



eral." *He is a Methodist.* Born in a Methodist home, the son and grandson of Methodists on both sides of his family, converted during a Methodist revival, trained in a Methodist school, and having spent a large part of his life in the study of Methodist history and Methodist doctrine, he claims to know what Methodism is.

The author rejoices in the fact that he is a member of the Methodist Church. He would, therefore, make his own the wise words of one of England's greatest theologians: "The Christian theologian does not speak as a free lance; he is a member of a religious community and is under obligation to maintain as far as possible its continuity of faith, its spiritual identity. While the questions of the young must be answered and their doubts met, the experience of the aged must not be disregarded nor their hearts wounded by wanton denials of what they hold most dear. The theologian is an intellectual mediator between God and man, and as he is responsible to God not to misinterpret his truth, he is responsible to men to give regard to the needs of their souls." (Garvie.)

Because it gives as comprehensive a summary of Methodist theology as can be found anywhere within equal compass and, because it says to our Methodist people exactly what this series of addresses is intended to say, I quote the following eloquent passage from a sermon by Dr. R. W. Dale on "The Theology of John Wesley":

"You are the heirs of great traditions. You stand in a noble succession. But

"“They who on glorious ancestry enlarge,  
Produce their debt instead of their discharge.”

Keep faith with your fathers; keep faith with Christ; keep faith with your children and your children's children; transmit to coming generations the gospel which has already won such splendid triumphs. It is a great gospel which you and your fathers have preached during the

hundred and fifty years of your history, a gospel which declares the love of God for all men. Preach it still with the same confidence of faith and the same passion of joy. Tell men that while they inherit by their birth the infirmities and sins of the race, they inherit also by their birth the salvation which Christ has achieved for all mankind. Tell them that they live, not in a lost world, but in a redeemed world; a world lost by its revolt against God and its alienation from the life of God, but redeemed in the blood of Christ and with powers in Christ and in the Spirit of Christ which render all righteousness possible. Tell men—all men—that they were created in Christ, and that when they discover and accept their true relation to him they will live under new heavens and on a new earth and will know the greatness of the sons of God. Tell them that they are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ; and that God chose them in him before the foundation of the world that they should be holy and without blemish before him in love; charge them not to defeat the purposes of the divine grace; but to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, and so to make their calling and election sure. See to it that through God's grace you know for yourselves that, through the merits of Christ, your sins are forgiven, and that you are indeed and of a truth the children of God; that your testimony to the Christian redemption may not rest on tradition but on your own personal experience. . . . I call upon you to resolve, with all the solemnity of an oath, that you will stand fast until you die in your fidelity to the truths which have given to Methodism its power and its glory; and that henceforth you will pray with a deeper earnestness and a firmer faith that the fires of Methodism may never be extinguished."

NASHVILLE, TENN., August 21, 1923.

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**I**

**FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF**

**THE APOSTLES' CREED AND THE TWENTY-FIVE ARTICLES  
OF RELIGION**





# I

## FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF

IN certain quarters so much is being said nowadays about "fundamentals" that it seems necessary for some one to call our Methodist people away from emphasis upon things contrary to the spirit and genius of Methodism to an understanding of what the fundamentals of Methodism really are. For it would be nothing short of disastrous, indeed it would be to turn the clock of spiritual progress back nearly two hundred years and undo the work of the great Wesleyan revival if certain alien principles now being clamorously proclaimed should gain the ascendancy and be mistaken for the sum and substance of Methodism.

As showing our Methodist emphasis, I set down here certain words from the pen of John Wesley:

There may be some well-meaning persons who aver that if they have not clear views of those capital doctrines—the fall of man, justification by faith, and the atonement made by the death of Christ and his righteousness transferred to them—they can have no benefit from his death. I dare in no wise affirm this. Indeed, I do not believe it. I believe the merciful God regards the lives of men more than their ideas. I believe he respects the goodness of the heart rather than the clearness of the head; and that if the heart of man be filled (by the grace of God and the power of his Spirit) with the humble, gentle, patient love of God and man, God will not cast him into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels, because his ideas are not clear or his conceptions are confused.

And if this is not plain enough, take another quotation from Wesley:

We do not lay the main stress of our religion on any opinions, right or wrong; neither do we begin, nor willingly join in, any

dispute concerning them. The weight of all religion rests on holiness of heart and life.

Now it is one thing to be *charitable* in reference to theological opinions, and it is another and a different thing to be *lax*. Laxness grows out of indifference or ignorance; charity shows depth of soul and springs from a genuine experience of vital godliness. Wesley had opinions of his own; there was nothing nebulous and uncertain about his theological beliefs. Everybody knew where he stood on all the great truths of the Christian faith. But Wesley had had a transforming experience of the grace of God, and he knew that this was the one thing to be sought above all else. Before his "conversion" he had been thoroughly orthodox, just as orthodox as he was after his conversion, *but his orthodoxy did not save him*. What made a new man of Wesley was the experience he had in Aldersgate Street, at that memorable prayer meeting, when he "felt his heart strangely warmed." Wesley knew what was of first importance to him; and what was of first importance to him he believed to be of first importance to all men. And this is precisely why we Methodists have always allowed others large liberty of thinking. With us *regeneration* and a *Christlike life* are the things that really matter.

*But this does not mean that we Methodists do not hold strongly to very definite views touching Christian belief and Christian life.* We agree fully with Wesley when, in his sermon on "The Catholic Spirit," he says:

A man of a truly catholic spirit has not now his religion to seek. He is fixed as the sun in his judgment concerning the main branches of Christian doctrine. He does not halt between two opinions nor vainly endeavor to blend them into one. Observe this: You know not what a spirit you are of; who call yourselves men of a catholic spirit, only because you are of a muddy understanding; because your mind is all in a mist; because you have no settled, constant principles, but are for jumbling all opinion together. Be convinced that you have quite missed your way; you know not where you are.

You think you are got into the very spirit of Christ, when, in truth, you are nearer the spirit of Antichrist. Go first and learn the elements of the gospel of Christ, and then shall you learn to be of a truly catholic spirit.

There are certain very important Methodist fundamentals—fundamentals of *Belief*, of *Practice*, and of *Experience*; and touching these I purpose saying some things in language which all can understand.

In a word, then, Methodism comes to the world with *three great documents in her hand and with a glorious experience in her heart*. It would be more logical, and more in keeping with the genesis of Methodism, if I should speak first of this glorious experience. But for the sake of emphasis I shall leave this till I have spoken of the three great documents which Methodism holds in her possession.

These documents are the *Apostles' Creed*, the *Twenty-Five Articles of Religion*, and the *General Rules of the United Societies*. *The Apostles' Creed* shows our connection with the Church of the early centuries; *the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion* show our connection with the great Protestant Reformation in England; while the *General Rules*, which came from the hand of Wesley himself, keep ever before us the type of piety which is the standard and ideal for all who seek to live the life of the people called Methodists. To repeat, here are the Fundamentals of Methodism: The Apostles' Creed, the Twenty-Five Articles, the General Rules, and a Gracious Experience of Personal Salvation. I shall discuss these fundamentals briefly in the order given. I confine myself in the present chapter to the consideration of the first two documents, the Apostles' Creed and the Twenty-Five Articles, reserving for later discussion the General Rules and the Gracious Experience of Religion out of which came the Methodist presentation of the essential doctrines of Christian experience, a complement of doctrines distinctive of Methodism and peculiarly our own.



## I

*The Apostles' Creed*

As it stands in our Book of Discipline this historic creed reads as follows:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church;<sup>1</sup> the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

This brief and simple statement of the fundamental facts and doctrines of the Christian religion is an inheritance from the early centuries of the Christian Church. It was of gradual growth and traces far back into the earliest period of Christian history. With us Methodists, it is used as a baptismal confession of faith and is recited every Sunday as the united confession of the faith of the worshiping congregation. *This is the one and only creed which we require for admission into our communion.* In this we are in perfect harmony with the early Church. This apostolic confession we do require, but we require nothing more whatsoever in the way of creed from those who seek our fellowship in working out their salvation. Thus Methodism builds where the apostolic Church built. One may hold any view whatsoever touching historical, scientific, and literary matters, which does not contradict or deny the facts and doctrines herein set forth, and be a true Methodist.

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<sup>1</sup>A Church broad enough to embrace all who worship and serve Jesus Christ and preaching a gospel large enough to meet all the spiritual needs of all men,

Furthermore, one may hold to doctrines not in harmony with the scheme of Wesleyan Arminian theology preached by Methodism and still be a member of the Methodist Church. For we steadfastly hold with John Wesley that "we have no more right to object to a man for holding a different opinion from our own than we have to object to his wearing a wig while we wear our own hair." But as Wesley said, "when he takes off his wig and begins to shake the powder about my eyes, then I do have a right to object."

I rejoice that we of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in particular, are true to the early apostolic tradition and to early Methodist practice in requiring for Church membership the historic creed of Christendom and no further creed. It should be clearly understood that we do not require those who seek to become members of our Church to subscribe to all the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion. For evidently that would shut most people out of the Church entirely. What I mean to say is this: The language of some of the Twenty-Five Articles is highly metaphysical and theological, and the majority of people are not theologians and metaphysicians. To require our children to affirm that they believe them would be to make belief mean **nothing** having any relation to the understanding and the life; and to call upon the busy man from the farm and the office and the store to affirm his belief in difficult theological terminology would be to shut out a very large number of honest and useful Christian men. Not a complicated theology, but simple faith in Christ makes a man a Christian.

It would be a tragedy to see our Methodism, with her glorious record of catholicity, tied up in a theological strait-jacket. But even so, Methodism could not long be held in bondage; for when once more the power of the Spirit came upon her, she would break her bonds and assert her God-given freedom.

## II

*The Twenty-Five Articles of Religion*

The Twenty-five Articles of Religion are one of the doctrinal standards of Methodism. According to the general scheme of religion as set forth in this historic document, all Methodist preachers are under solemn obligation to teach and preach. These Articles constitute one of the most important and significant "fundamentals" of Methodism. And, as has already been suggested, these Articles of Religion show our connection with the great Protestant Reformation, especially in England. It should be remembered that not only did the *Articles of Religion* come out of the Protestant Reformation in England, the *Liturgy* of the Church was also the product of that great movement. It is Cranmer's voice that sounds still in those stately sentences. Doctrine is to be found, therefore, in the Ritual of the Church as well as in the Articles of Religion; and in several instances the statement of faith contained in the Articles is supplemented or completed in the more elaborate Ritual. Moreover, it is certain that the doctrinal parts of our Ritual are protected by the "Restrictive Rule" which prohibits the General Conference from revoking, altering, or changing our Articles of Religion, or establishing any new standards or rule of doctrine "contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine." And this is as it should be. For with certain men on the one hand, who pride themselves on a "liberality" which, to use Bushnell's language, "loosens the terms of truth, permitting easily and with careless magnanimity variations from it"; and with certain men, on the other hand, who are in bondage to literalism and who would turn us back to a crude and outworn theology which we discarded at the very beginning of our history, Methodism is fortunate in finding herself in such a sound and Scriptural position.



The shifting tides of superficial thought will not easily shake her from her foundation, and the clamorous demands of modern creed makers will not soon be able to set up and establish any "new standards or rules of doctrine."

Methodism brought forward and completed the English Protestant Reformation. One always has the feeling that the Church of England stopped halfway between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in spite of the fact that she began so nobly with the statement of evangelical faith in her Edwardine and Elizabethan Articles and in her unequalled Liturgy. The beginning of the Methodist Revival was under the leadership of clergymen of the Church of England and laymen whose early lives had been spent under the influence of that great Church. When the Methodist Episcopal Church in America was organized at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore in 1784, John Wesley, Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury, and the others did not suppose that there would ever be organized in America another and a second Protestant Episcopal Church. For it needs to be remembered that the Protestant Episcopal Church was not organized until something more than two years later and by special act of the English Parliament. Meantime the Methodist Episcopal Church, which had served itself heir to the noble Protestant inheritance of the Church of England and the priceless spiritual riches which came from God through Wesley and those associated with him, had entered upon its glorious career as the great Episcopal Church of America. These facts need to be stated and to be understood. For in the light of our historic connection with the Reformation in England must the Twenty-Five Articles be read and interpreted.

The Twenty-Five Articles, then, are taken from the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. When



Wesley sent over Thomas Coke with authority to organize the American Methodists into a Church, he placed in his hands for the Methodists of America these Articles as we now have them, with the exception, of course, of the Twenty-Third.<sup>2</sup> He had left out certain Articles and had altered certain others, thus reducing the number. He also made certain changes in the Liturgy of the Church of England and recommended its use as "breathing a solid, Scriptural, and rational piety." This Liturgy forms the basis of our present Ritual.

The purpose of this book, which is only an introductory study, does not allow a discussion of each of the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion. (Dr. Thomas O. Summers devoted two stout volumes to that great task.) All that is here proposed is a very brief mention of certain important facts and essential doctrines which call for attention in any survey of the Fundamental Belief of Methodism..

1. *The first thing to be mentioned is the fact that we have here the Protestant view of the Holy Scriptures as distinguished from the Roman Catholic.*

It will be observed that we have two Articles on the Bible, Article V, "Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation," and Article VI, "Of the Old Testament." Concerning the Old Testament two important things are said: (1) "The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for in both everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ." To discount and to neglect the Old Testament is to suffer great spiritual loss. The Old Testament contains a true revelation from God. It is not yet a full revelation; for "God of old time spake unto the fathers in many parts and in many manners," there being imperfection as well as variety in the earlier revelation. But the Old Testament looks forward to Christ and prepares the way for the New Testament. The two taken

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<sup>2</sup> This is an article on "the Rulers of the United States of America."

together make one Bible. (2) The other thing of importance is this: In the Old Testament there are "ceremonies and rites" which do not bind Christians; "notwithstanding no Christian whatsoever is free from the obedience to the commandments which are called moral." *That is to say, it is the moral and spiritual message of the Old Testament which has significance and eternal worth.* And the Old Testament must be read in the light of the New.

The Protestant view of the Bible is made perfectly plain in the following language: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." *This sweeps aside the claim of any Church to say to the individual Christian exactly what he must believe, and it denies to tradition any value unless it is in harmony with the plain sense of Scripture.* The language used in this Article, "*Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation,*" is, in another particular, set over against the Roman Catholic view of the Bible. "The Reformers drew a distinction between the word of God and the Scripture which *contains* or *presents* that word. If the use of the metaphor be allowed, the word of God is to the Scripture as the soul is to the body." When we say that the Bible is the word of God, it "must be clearly understood that the copula *is* does not express logical identity, but some such relation as can be more exactly rendered by *contains, presents, conveys, records*—all of which phrases are used in the writings of the Reformers or in the creeds of the Reformation Churches. The main thing to remember is that the distinction is not to be made use of to deny to the substance of Scripture those attributes of authority and infallibility which belong to the word of God." Let it be noted in passing that not one

word is said in our Articles on the Bible about the "verbal dictation" theory of inspiration.

We need to keep in mind the essential difference between the Roman Catholic and the Protestant conception of the Holy Scriptures. According to Roman Catholicism "the Bible was a sort of spiritual law book, a storehouse of divinely communicated knowledge, of doctrinal truths, and rules for moral conduct and nothing more." The Roman Catholic theologians were utterly lacking in the historical sense. To them one part of the Bible was of as much value as another, if they could only find out what that part of the Bible meant. So in order to make the Bible mean what they wanted it to mean, the Church of Rome resorted to its fourfold sense: *literal*, *moral*, *allegorical*, and *anagogic*. So as no layman could possibly understand such a Bible, the Church of Rome took the Bible out of his hands and declared that he had no right to try to understand it. Rome alone could tell him what it meant.

Now, how far is all this removed from the true position of Protestant Christianity! "It is the unanimous declaration of the Reformers that Scripture is Scripture because it gives us that knowledge of God and of his will which is necessary for salvation; because it presents to the eye of faith God himself personally manifesting himself in Christ. It is this presentation of God himself and of his will for our salvation which is infallible and authoritative. But this manifestation of God himself is something spiritual, and is to be apprehended by the spiritual faculty which is faith; and the Reformers and the Confessions of the Reformation do not recognize any infallibility or divine authority which is otherwise apprehended than by faith. With the mediæval theologian infallibility was something which guaranteed the perfect correctness of abstract propositions; with some modern Protestants it consists in the conception that the record contains not even the smallest error in word or description of fact—



in its inerrancy. But neither inerrancy nor the correctness of abstract propositions is apprehended by faith in the Reformers' sense of that word; they are matters of fact, to be accepted or rejected by the ordinary faculties of man. The infallibility and authority which need faith to perceive them are, and must be, something very different; they produce the conviction that in the manifestation of God in his word there lies infallible power to save." (For an adequate discussion of this important subject the reader is referred to Lindsay's "History of the Reformation," Volume I, pp. 455-467, from which the above quotations are taken. Lindsay's monumental work is, by appointment of our College of Bishops, in the course of study for the proper instruction of our young preachers.)

In concluding this short discussion of our belief concerning the Bible, mention must be made of the way in which Wesley himself speaks of the authority of the written word of God. In the concluding paragraph of the General Rules, he says that "the written word of God is *the only rule and the sufficient rule both of our faith and practice.*" This is our faith. In this we rest.

2. *Our Protestant doctrine touching the sacraments of the Church is set forth in contrast with the Roman Catholic view.* (See Articles XVI, XVII, XVIII, XIX, and XX.)

In addition to such institutions as Christ had ordained to be means of grace for our salvation, Rome had added many others. Thus Rome stood with her doctrine that grace, with its saving power, flows down through her sacraments of *baptism*, *confirmation*, *matrimony*, *penance*, the *eucharist*, and *extreme unction*. Thus through *baptism* came salvation; through *confirmation* the Holy Ghost was given; through the *sacrament of matrimony* marriage was cleansed from the sin of lust; by *penance* sins were forgiven; in the *eucharist* the soul was fed; in *extreme unction*, all sin was cleansed away and the soul made fit for heaven. "These ceremonies were not signs and promises of the



free grace of God, under whose wide canopy, as under that of heaven, man lived his spiritual life. They were jealously guarded doors from out of which grudgingly, and commonly not without fees, the priests dispensed the free grace of God." "Thus everywhere the priesthood barred, or was supposed to bar, the way to God." (Lindsay.)

All this Protestantism brushed aside. For when Martin Luther went directly to God in Christ, the whole Roman system collapsed. When there sounded in his soul the word of God, "The just shall live by faith," then New Testament Christianity was reborn. The experience which Luther had, John Wesley also had. The Protestant experience of salvation through faith and faith alone, came to another and fuller expression during the Wesleyan Revival. This is the great glad gospel of Jesus Christ which Methodism sounds out to all the world, the fact that every man may come directly to Christ for salvation, the proclamation of the priesthood of all believers. And when one has come to Christ and found salvation in him alone he is filled with a sense of certainty which enables him to sing with the great Reformer:

"Though the whole world with devils swarmed,  
And threatened us to swallow,  
We will not fear, for we are armed  
And victory will follow."

More than half of all our Articles of Religion, it should be observed, are in protest against the errors of Roman Catholicism. They were written when the fight with Rome was at its height, and they were written by Cranmer, who, it will be remembered, was burned at the stake because of his Protestant faith. Our Methodist Articles are Protestant Articles. Methodism roots back into the Reformation. We are in this holy apostolic succession.

3. *In a very important particular our Methodist Articles of Religion differ from the Articles of the Church of England.*

*Wesley, after the study of a lifetime, carefully omitted such Articles and such parts of Articles as were Calvinistic.*

For instance, he left out entirely Article XVII, which teaches the doctrine of "Predestination and Election." He left out also Article XIII, in which it is declared that good works done before justification "are not pleasant to God," but "have the nature of sin." And to take one other illustration, from the Article on "Original or Birth Sin" he cut away fully half in his effort to get the Calvinism out of it, in particular leaving out that part which declares that "in every person born into this world, it [original sin] deserveth God's wrath and condemnation." Calvinism is something more than the doctrine of election and predestination. Its conception of God, its view of the utter wickedness of human nature, its theory of the Atonement, its doctrine of imputed righteousness, its denial of man's free moral agency, as well as its teaching concerning election and predestination—are all parts of one systematic and logical whole. Wesley parted company with the entire system. Wesleyan Arminian theology and Calvinism are at the opposite poles of theological thought. They cannot be made to agree the one with the other.

One may, indeed, remain a Calvinist in his thinking and be a true and loyal member of the Methodist Church. For Methodism has no theological requirements for Church membership. Methodism invites and welcomes all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. But our Articles of Religion are a *functional requirement* of those who enter our ministry; and *Methodism cannot tolerate the teaching and preaching of doctrines which are definitely Calvinistic, no matter what form those doctrines may take.*

4. *In any statement of faith which is truly Christian, the central and supreme place must be given to Jesus Christ.* Article II, "Of the Word, or Son of God, who was made

very Man," Article III, "Of the Resurrection of Christ," and Article XX, "Of the One Oblation of Christ, finished upon the Cross"—these present the historic Christian belief concerning the *Incarnation*, the *Atoning Death*, and the *Resurrection of our Lord*.

(1) The Incarnation of God in Christ is a fact. Without the Incarnation there would be no Christian Church in the world to-day. Indeed, God was so perfectly manifested in Christ that it is forever impossible to think of God without thinking in terms of Jesus. The "virgin birth" is the method by which the fact of the Incarnation was realized. The birth of Christ took place in a miraculous way, but his "virgin life"—"holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners"—is a greater miracle than his "virgin birth," as the spiritual is higher than the physical. It is a plain fact of history that God did reveal himself fully in Jesus Christ. In him we find God and God finds us.

"And so the Word had breath, and wrought  
With human hands the creed of creeds  
In loveliness of perfect deeds,  
More strong than all poetic thought."

(2) The Atoning Death of Christ has always been the central theme of Christian preaching. The Cross of Christ is the very heart of the gospel. Everything comes to a focus in the cross. All that Jesus is, in his life and in his ministry, converges in this one burning point. Here Christ shows the hatefulness of sin and forever judges and condemns it; here he reveals the love of the Father and crowns the great principle of vicarious suffering which runs through life from the tiniest protoplasmic cell all the way up to the high and holy God. It will be observed, however, that *Methodism has no theory of the Atonement*. Throughout the Christian centuries there have been many attempts to formulate a complete ex-



planation of the mystery of the Death of Christ for the sins of the whole world. None of these attempts have been wholly satisfactory; each glimpses the mighty event from its own angle. It is, therefore, a mistake to take any one of the theories now current—whether the *Penal Substitution Theory*, the *Governmental Theory*, or the *Moral Influence Theory*—and identify that theory with the fact. Methodism proclaims the great redeeming fact and gives it the central place in her gospel, leaving devout students of theology free to interpret the work of the Redeemer as they may, provided always that they do so in harmony with the language of the New Testament and in keeping with the facts of Christian experience; and, provided also, that they do not break with that interpretation of the Atonement which has been the consistent doctrine of the Church from the earliest centuries—namely, that the Death of Christ has a Godward aspect as well as a manward. To do this an adequate theory must show that the Death of Christ not only influences man, but satisfies God—satisfies both his holiness and his love.

One great truth concerning the Atonement Methodism has done more than any other denomination to make plain and to sound out in all the corners of the world—namely, *the fact that Christ died for all men*. Our Article XX declares that “the offering of Christ once made is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual.” And our Ritual for the administration of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper teaches that God the Father, of his tender mercy, did give his only Son Jesus Christ “to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there (by his oblation of himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.”

Thus the cross of Christ stands in the midst of human



history—high as the holiness and love of God, deep as the sin and sorrow of man, and reaching out its arms to all the world!

(3) The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is a twofold fact, a fact of history and a fact of experience. The empty grave, the recovered and triumphant faith of the disciples, and the existence of the Christian Church—all proclaim it to be a fact of history. The wonderful record of faith and life contained in the New Testament bears witness that the Resurrection of Christ was a glorious fact of experience to the early disciples; and the power of Christianity in the world to-day and the inner witness of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers bear present and living testimony that the Christ who lived and died is alive forevermore. Nothing in history and experience is more certain than this.

*5. The place and purpose of the Church must receive attention if our interpretation of Christianity and our witness to its power are to be understood and appreciated.*

Article XIII, "Of the Church," is as follows:

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all things that are requisite to the same.

This statement is completed in the Ritual for the Reception and Recognition of Members. The minister thus addresses the congregation, after having brought forward the candidates:

Brethren, the Church is of God, and will be preserved to the end of time, for the promotion of his worship and the due administration of his word and ordinances—the maintenance of Christian fellowship and discipline—the edification of believers, and the conversion of the world.

The Church is no transient organization. It was established by Christ for "*the conversion of the world.*"

The program of the Church, then, is something other than "the accomplishment of God's elect"; it is rather "*the conversion of the world.*" Christ's command is: "Go ye therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." And his promise concerning his Church is: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Therefore, in obedience to the Divine command and encouraged by the Divine promise, the Church addresses herself to her great program of educational, evangelistic, missionary, and social service. Well does Dr. Charles E. Jefferson say in his Yale Lectures: "The Church is an essential constituent of the Christian religion. The principles of Jesus do not enthrone themselves in human society without the assistance of the Church. The Church is in literal truth the body of Christ. Without it he does no mighty deeds. The amount of work he accomplishes in every country is conditioned upon the character of the Church in that country. The kind of service he performs in any community is determined by the character of the Christian society in that community. Wherever the Church prospers, society improves. Wherever the Church languishes, society degenerates. When the Church is vigorous, the social atmosphere becomes bracing and clear; when the Church becomes worldly and corrupt, the sun is turned into darkness and the moon into blood. There is no hope for the triumph of Christian religion outside the Church."

6. *Another thing needs to be said: The end toward which the Church labors, the purpose for which our Lord came into the world, will be finally and fully accomplished when Christ comes again.*

Our doctrine touching this matter finds statement in three different places in the Book of Discipline. In the Apostles' Creed it is said that Christ "ascended into heav-

en, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." In Article III the statement is a little fuller: "He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day." And in our solemn Ritual for the Burial of the Dead, we read: "Forasmuch as the spirit of our deceased brother hath returned unto God who gave it, we therefore commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; looking for the general resurrection in the last day, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ; at whose second coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead; and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in him shall be changed, and made like unto his own glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself."

From these declarations it is clear that we hold: (1) that *Christ shall come again*, (2) that he shall come *to judge both the quick and the dead*, and (3) that he shall return to judge all men *at the last day*.

It is manifest at once that any premillenarian view of the Second Coming of Christ which teaches that the world must of necessity grow worse and worse, and that Christ is to come the second time to inaugurate a new method of converting men in which display of power and exercise of force shall accomplish what the preaching of the gospel and the silent influence of the Holy Spirit are powerless to do, cannot possibly be harmonized with our Methodist teaching concerning this great event.

Christ shall come again. This has been the hope of the Church throughout all the centuries. But this truth must not be so stated as, in effect, to teach the doctrine of an *absentee Christ*. Christ is not absent, but present. He is now at work in the world. His promise is: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." The



significance of Pentecost is that *then* and *there* the disciples came to realize that Christ had come again and would never go away. And at notable epochs in history Christ has manifested himself in a special and powerful manner—as during the Protestant Reformation and during the Wesleyan Revival. The New Testament looks forward, however, to a final consummation when he shall come with great power and glory. This is the supreme goal of human history. “Moreover,” as Dr. R. H. Mackintosh has said, “apart from such *dénouement* the course of human history as a whole is devoid of ultimate value. It is not too much to say that the world owes the sense of history to religious belief in eschatology.” The Greeks had no conception of history moving forward to a definite and final consummation. With Christians, “the complete and universal triumph of Christ is as sure as his triumph over death. In the New Testament Resurrection and Return may almost be called two sides of one fact. The world thinks that Jesus has been disposed of; the Church knows that because he has risen, all will yet be confronted with him. The Christian prospect is not exhausted in the going of believers to where he is, singly and gradually—a piecemeal draining of life into the next world. There will be a final manifestation of his supremacy in a mode recognizable by all and exhibiting the last issues of the divine redemptive rule of all things in heaven and earth.”

“He comes again: O Zion, ere thou meet him,  
Make known to every heart his saving grace;  
Let none whom he hath ransomed fail to greet him,  
Through thy neglect, unfit to see his face.”

Our Twenty-Five Articles of Religion are both definitely Protestant and distinctly Wesleyan. To us, therefore, they have a value both doctrinal and historical. As first prepared by Cranmer and those associated with him, they were written when it was necessary for men to state their



faith. It could not be avoided. And as amended and abbreviated by Wesley, they took their present form at a time when elimination and correction had to be made. The great creeds of Christendom were written when men greatly believed. They "spring out of the perennial vigor of faith, out of the capacity of faith to unfold from within its own depths a wealth of treasures of wisdom and knowledge, to build up a kingdom of acknowledged truths, by which it illumines itself as well as the surrounding world. A mind starved by doubt has never been able to produce a dogmatic system." (Martensen's "Christian Dogmatics," pp. 3, 4.) That is to say, theology springs out of experience, and a great experience finds expression in a great confession of faith.

In this connection it will be worth while to recall the wise words spoken by Bishop Alpheus W. Wilson during the session of the General Conference in the city of Birmingham, in 1906:

These Articles of Faith are the normal outcome of our spiritual experience. The Church did not formulate Articles of Faith first, and then proceed to shape its Christian experience upon the ground and after the model of those Articles of Faith. It was a very simple faith in the beginning. They believed in Jesus Christ our Lord; and, as the inevitable outcome of that, they began to broaden in their views of him and put him in his true place in relation to thought and life and everything; and by and by these found expression in the terms of faith as we have them in the manifold creeds, and we cannot get rid of them, and never will until we get rid of that which is fundamental and lies below the whole of our spiritual experience. The Rock on which we build is not a creed and not a literal statement of any fact, or anything except Jesus Christ and him crucified. The Rock on which we build is the revelation of Jesus Christ, who is in us by the Spirit of the Living God. And the Church (and Wesleyanism has revived it in the Church perhaps more than any other ecclesiastical system) has built upon that from the beginning. Now I am perfectly satisfied with the Articles of Faith as we have them. I think they will satisfy the faith of the world for many generations to come.

With this statement I fully agree. These Articles will stand, of course not as a finality, for nothing human is final, but until some great crisis comes with some new and deeper experience of Divine grace and some new insight into the meaning of God's Word. Meantime, loyal Methodists will continue to teach and preach in harmony with this Protestant and Wesleyan statement of the things which are believed and experienced among us.

This discussion would be incomplete if I did not call attention to an important and necessary distinction pointed out by Dr. Abel Stevens between *obligatory* and *indicatory* standards of doctrine. When Wesley completed the organization of his societies in England and provided for their permanent existence, he did not change their terms of membership as recorded in the "General Rules." He never inserted a dogmatic requirement; and in his last years more than ever boasted of the liberality of his system. However, he did require that his preachers should preach no other doctrine than is contained in his Notes on the New Testament and the Standard Sermons. But for members of his societies these doctrinal standards were *indicatory* and not *obligatory*. "They could see in the theological standards of Methodism what doctrines they would be likely to hear from its pulpits. They could judge thereby whether its societies would be suitable sanctuaries for them and their families. They found, however, but one condition required for admission into its communion—that defined in its "General Rules."

It is a noteworthy fact that, in providing for the organization of American Methodism, Wesley did not change the "General Rules" as the basis of membership, though he prepared for it "Articles of Religion." This interesting historical fact is full of significance, as an example of that distinction between *indicatory* and *obligatory* standards of theological belief which Methodism has, perhaps, had the honor of first exemplifying among the leading Churches of the modern Christian world. The "Articles of Religion" and the "General Rules" are both parts of the constitutional law of American

Methodism; but the "General Rules" still prescribe the "only condition" of membership and mention not the "Articles" or any other dogmatic symbols. Conformity to the doctrines of the Church is required as a functional qualification of the ministry, but Church members cannot be excluded for personal opinions while their lives conform to the practical discipline of the Church; they can be tried for "sowing dissensions in the societies by inveighing against their doctrines and discipline"; that is, in other words, not for their opinions, but for their moral conduct respecting their opinions. (Stevens's "History of Methodism," Vol. II, p. 448.)

We have seen, however, that all who come to our altars for baptism are required to give assent to the ancient baptismal confession known as the Apostles' Creed. If it be asked, How is this consistent with Wesley's "one condition previously required"—namely, "a desire to flee from the wrath to come and to be saved from their sins"—a desire which when firmly fixed in the heart will show itself in a willingness to conform to the "General Rules" of the Church? the answer is plain: The Apostles' Creed is not in any sense a *theological statement*. It is rather a setting forth in the briefest possible form of the *historic facts* upon which the Christian Church is founded. As a matter of course, our "one condition" presupposes the existence of Christianity and belief in the foundation facts upon which rests the edifice of the Christian religion. Methodism lays down no theological requirement for Church membership and allows large liberty of thinking. But belief in the essential facts of Christianity is, of course, necessary to the being of the Church of Jesus Christ.

This, then, is the sum of the things which I have written. The one creed which Methodism requires of those who seek the fellowship of our communion is that ancient creed known as the Apostles' Creed, the creed of Christendom. It matters not what else a man may believe or may not believe, if he heartily accepts the brief statements set forth in this ancient symbol, then he may become a Methodist. Besides this, in the Twenty-Five Articles of



Religion, we have an important historical document connecting Methodism directly with the Protestant Reformation; and this Protestant document is a standard of doctrine for all our teachers and preachers. In harmony with the Protestant interpretation of Christianity, we must preach and teach.

It should be a matter of considerable satisfaction that Methodism rests upon this Apostolic and Protestant and Wesleyan foundation. Here we stand secure. This foundation is broad enough for all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and strong enough to resist all such as seek to destroy it or to substitute for it another foundation not laid either by the apostles, the Reformers, or our Methodist fathers.

It is to be hoped that the reading of this exposition will lead more than a few to a better understanding of Methodism and to join with the writer in saying:

Faith of our fathers! we will love  
Both friend and foe in all our strife:  
And preach thee, too, as love knows how,  
By kindly words and virtuous life:  
Faith of our fathers! holy faith!  
We will be true to thee till death.





II  
FUNDAMENTAL PRACTICE  
THE GENERAL RULES OF THE UNITED SOCIETIES



## II

### FUNDAMENTAL PRACTICE

*“There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies, a ‘desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.’”*

Thus wrote Wesley upon the organization of the United Societies which afterwards developed into the Methodist Church. However, he immediately went on to say that “wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits.” It was, therefore, expected of all who continued in fellowship with the Methodists that they should continue to evidence their desire for salvation by living in conformity with the General Rules—Rules, it will be seen, which speak only of the Christian life and the means of maintaining and perfecting that life. *These Rules are the recognized terms of Church membership throughout Methodism.* As Dr. Abel Stevens says: *“They are remarkable as not containing a single dogmatic condition of communion.”*

It is important that we should hear John Wesley himself on this point. In his Journal, under date of May 18, 1788, he writes as follows:

There is no religious society under heaven which requires nothing of men in order to their admission into it but a desire to save their souls. Look all round you; you cannot be admitted into the Church, or society of the Presbyterians, Anabaptists, Quakers, or any others, unless you hold the same opinions with them and adhere to the same mode of worship. The Methodists alone do not insist on your holding this or that opinion; but they think and let think. Neither do they impose any particular mode of worship; but you may continue to worship in your former manner, be it **what** it may. Now, I do not know any other religious society, either ancient or modern, wherein such liberty of conscience is now allowed, or has been allowed, since the age of the apostles. Here is our glorying, and a glorying peculiar to us. What society shares it with us?



Again, under date of August 26, 1789, a year and six months before his death, he writes:

I then met the society and explained at large the nature and rise of Methodism; and still aver, I have never read or heard of, either in ancient or modern history, any other Church<sup>1</sup> which builds on so broad a foundation as the Methodists do; which requires of its members no conformity either in opinions or modes of worship, but barely this one thing, to fear God and work righteousness.

*Unfortunately in recent years a false note has been sounded in Methodism, a note which calls attention to things to be believed rather than a life in Christ to be lived.* There have arisen among us some who insist that a correct creed is of more importance than a good life. They seem to take the position that if one's creed is correct, one's life will necessarily be righteous. There is immense peril in this position. For the next step may lead one to conclude that his own life is a Christian life, because, forsooth, his creed is in perfect harmony with orthodox standards. Then the further step may be taken which leads the poor, misguided man to the conclusion that his brother is a bad man for the good and sufficient reason that his brother does not agree with him in all his theological tenets.

We Methodists, on the contrary, hold no such view. We believe that a "pure heart" is of even greater importance than a "clear head." For as Jesus said: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." We believe that a correct creed is important, but we hold firmly to the view that a Christlike life is the final test of one's religion. Indeed, this is the final test of all religion, the kind of man that it produces. And this is the final test of the value of any creed. Does it make one narrow and unbrotherly and critical? Does it take the milk of kindness out of the human breast? Does it fill one with the

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<sup>1</sup>Observe that Wesley here uses the word "Church."

spirit of the inquisitor and the persecutor? Or does it make one broad and brotherly and charitable? Does it fill one with tender sympathy for all who have stumbled in the path or gone out of the way? Does it give one the mind that was in Christ, who came to seek and to save that which was lost and whose gracious words to the penitent were, "Go and sin no more"? I repeat, the ultimate test of creed and of religion is the kind of life that they produce.

Throughout his long life John Wesley continually insisted that the chief thing God had raised up the Methodists to do was "to spread scriptural holiness over these lands." When speaking of this, Wesley sometimes used

I find more profit in sermons on either good tempers or good works than what are vulgarly called "gospel sermons." That word has now become a mere cant word. I wish none of our society would use it. It has no determinate meaning. Let but a pert, self-sufficient animal that has neither sense nor grace bawl out something about Christ or his blood or justification by faith and his hearers cry out, "What a fine gospel sermon."

It is quite evident that Wesley had little patience with preaching that did not insist on a pure heart and love to God and man. And it is a most unfortunate thing that nowadays we hear all too little of the fundamental Methodist teaching that Christianity's chief purpose is to make good men and good women.

Let it be said, then, that the *General Rules* are as truly one of the fundamentals of Methodism as the *Apostles' Creed* and the *Twenty-Five Articles of Religion*. For Methodist "discipline" is as much a part of Methodism as is Methodist "doctrine." These General Rules were drawn up by Wesley himself for the guidance of those earnest Christians who looked to him as their pastor and teacher. And I capitally doubt if a more perfect and complete

outline of Christian conduct was ever drawn by the hand of an uninspired man. As a matter of fact, these General Rules are not so much "rules" as "principles." That is to say, they do not attempt to regulate the details of one's life, but rather to furnish, and that largely in the very language of the New Testament, great principles by which one should direct his conduct as a Christian. And attention should be drawn to the fact that they are not many. Indeed, strictly speaking, *there are only three General Rules.*

According to these Rules all who desire to continue in fellowship with the Methodists must evidence their desire for salvation:

*"First, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced;*

*"Secondly, by doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men;*

*"Thirdly, by attending upon all the ordinances of God."*

It will be seen at once that under the first "Rule" we have presented *the negative aspect of the Christian life*, things that a Christian ought not to do; under the second "Rule" we have *the positive aspect of the Christian life*, things that a Christian ought to do to help others and to make the world better; while under the third "Rule" we have outlined the "means of grace," which a Christian should use in his own *spiritual self-culture*, that he may grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

## I

*Consider, then, the Methodist Rule touching the negative aspect of the Christian life. A Methodist must do no harm, he must avoid evil of every kind.*

Methodism was the revival of the best things in Puritanism. It is easy enough to make sport of the Puritans,



and it is the fashion nowadays to do so. But our English and American civilization is under everlasting obligation to them. In all our history no other movement plowed so deep a furrow and sowed so fruitful a harvest of righteousness as did Puritanism. Consider some things that came to us through Puritanism. Our faith in an overruling Providence and our belief in the value of the individual to God came through the Puritans. Our reverence for Holy Scripture, our regard for the Christian Sabbath, our hatred of sins of the flesh, and our attitude toward such amusements as "cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus"—all these came to us through the influence of the Puritans. Wesley himself was born in a Puritan home and trained by a Puritan mother. And the best things in Puritanism came to Wesley through his wise mother. As another has said: "The loss of Puritanism is one of the dangers of the present to Methodism." A better rule could not be laid down at the present time than that which Susannah Wesley wrote for the guidance of her son:

**Would** you judge of the lawfulness or unlawfulness of pleasure? **Take this rule:** Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself.

Under this first Rule there follow certain special applications of the principle involved. One or two of these have no great interest for us at the present time, as the evils referred to are not very generally practiced among us; for instance, the one forbidding "the buying or selling of goods that have not paid the duty." There is one which warns against "the putting on of gold and costly apparel," which was very much called for in Wesley's day when, as another has said, the grand controversy was who could outeat, outdrink, and outdress his neighbor. And there



can be no doubt that, in this present day of fashion and extravagance, our people do need to be warned that one cannot spend hundreds of dollars on dress and thousands of dollars on gold and diamonds and pearls and then expect to be accounted a member of the kingdom of God.

There is yet another to which I feel constrained to make some more definite reference. I refer to that which warns against "taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus." *Nothing could be finer than that.* If one is really in earnest about the Christian life, that will settle for him practically every question touching "worldly amusements." For it is not possible to make out a list, long or short, of amusements that are permissible and amusements that are not permissible. Concerning many things, it cannot be said that they are either right or wrong in themselves; whether they are right or wrong will depend entirely upon the spirit in which one enters into them. If they cannot be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus," that settles it. St. Paul's high principle of Christian liberty brings us exactly to the same point: "All things are lawful to me; but not all things are expedient. All things are lawful to me; but I will not be brought under the power of any." "All things are lawful; but not all things edify. Let no man seek his own, but each his neighbor's good."

Whosoever else may compromise with the world, Methodists must not compromise. When Methodism compromises, she loses her quality and character and ceases to bear that testimony to "holiness unto the Lord" for the sake of which God raised her up and sent her forth into the world. For Methodism to compromise is for Methodism to die. To repeat words quoted above: "*The loss of Puritanism is one of the dangers of the present to Methodism.*"

And yet I must remind my brethren that these Methodist General Rules were never intended to be a rod to

beat the sheep with. Rather they are a staff with which to guide them. For it should not be forgotten but should always be remembered that "discipline" means "teaching," or "training;" and the use of "discipline" is for salvation and not for destruction. Its purpose is to hold up a lofty standard of Christian living before our people while the kind and sympathetic pastor guides his flock into paths of righteousness.

## II

*And consider what Wesley has to say about the positive aspect of the Christian life. A Methodist is expected to do good in every possible way, and as far as possible to all men.*

The Methodist way of life is something more than a *negative* renouncing of the world. Historians have drawn out a very interesting parallel between John Wesley and St. Francis of Assisi. The parallel is more superficial than real. St. Francis is the supreme and classic example of asceticism, with many tender and beautiful and human qualities which survive in spite of his asceticism. John Wesley, to a remarkable extent, left his asceticism behind, a discarded garment, when he put on the garments of the new life in Christ. Christianity knows nothing of self-denial for its own sake; and Methodism, when it is true to its spirit and genius, emphasizes self-denial only as the denial of the lower for the sake of the higher and the sacrifice of self in the service of mankind. A merely negative life is a very poor and beggarly life. It is, further, a very perilous life to live. The peril of the empty house is that the former inhabitant may return with other evil spirits like himself, "and the last state of that man becometh worse than the first."

The Methodist way of life, then, is far more than negative, it is very *positive*. We are exhorted and expected to "do good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men," "to their bodies by giving food to the hungry,

by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison;" "to their souls by instructing, reproof, exhorting all we have intercourse with." We are to do good "especially to them that are of the household of faith or earnestly desiring so to be," thus *endeavoring to make of the Church a genuine Christian brotherhood.*

It will be seen immediately that according to Wesley's understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ is not something purely individualistic; rather *it is essentially social.* The soul of man, it should always be remembered, is the one thing that has absolute value, the only thing that, considered in itself, has infinite worth. Everything else is of worth only as it relates to the soul. But man is a part of the society he lives in. He is rooted in his environment, and his environment becomes a part of himself. If man is to be fully saved, then the society in which he lives must be saved also. The New Testament recognizes this. Christ has a gospel for society as well as for the individual. As Canon Freemantle pointed out so ably in his Bampton Lectures, *the world itself is the subject of redemption.* Christ lived and taught and died not for the individual only, but that all society, all human life with all its varied institutions, might come under the redemptive power of his gospel. The preacher or teacher who discards and decries the orthodox emphasis on the social aspect of the gospel is simply throwing away half of his gospel to the hurt of the kingdom of God.

By a true Christian instinct, Wesley and the first Methodists saw that if men and women and little children were to be fully saved, they should be put in the best circumstances possible. All this is clearly seen in the kind of work which was carried on in the first Methodist church built in London. "The Foundry," so called because it was a church building made out of an old, abandoned foundry, was in almost every respect what one



would call a modern Institutional Church. It was a Methodist preaching place. And it was much more than that—it was the center of all Methodist activities in London. Connected with it were Christian and social activities of various kinds. Here was a book room for the sale of Wesley's publications; here was a savings bank and loan office for the help of the worthy poor; here was a free medical dispensary, the first established in London; here was a school for poor children; here was a home for the poor and helpless; and here was a Christian home where numbers of Christian workers resided and from which the sanctified spirit of Susannah Wesley went to God. *The Foundry incarnated the soul of Methodism, and Methodism to-day would do well to hark back to the spirit of her great founder.*

The attitude of Methodism toward philanthropy is thus described in "The Confessions of J. Lackington":

Mr. Wesley's people think that they cannot love their neighbor as themselves without endeavoring to find out every possible way by which they may be serviceable to the souls and bodies of their fellow creatures. In London and Bristol, and, I believe, in other places, some of their society who are able to pray, instruct, and exhort, endeavor to find out poor, distressed objects who are confined to their beds by diseases in poorhouses, prisons, lodging houses, dirty alleys, lanes, etc. These poor, forsaken outcasts of society they instruct, exhort, pray with, etc. To objects most in want they give money. Perhaps there cannot be any labor of love more praiseworthy or more deserving of encouragement, as great numbers of such poor, destitute wretches may at times be found languishing in a forlorn state, and generally die without any one caring anything about them; for none but such as are filled with the love of God and man will ever go into such loathsome places and habitations. I formerly accompanied some of these loving people in this work of mercy and have witnessed their cheerful performance of this great duty, which to a poor, selfish, unregenerate heart would be intolerable. But no labor, however disagreeable or hazardous to health or life, is too much to be performed by such as are thoroughly impressed with the worth of an immortal soul; who are persuaded that *Christ tasted death for every man and would that every*

*man should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved.* While they were employed in this solemn work, if they could discover any poor creature that gave them reason to hope for his conversion, O, what love and joy warmed every heart!

And the work which these Methodists did in England was of such a sort that it brought about a tremendous social reform. Concerning this, Green, the historian of the English people, writes as follows:

But the Methodists themselves were the least result of the Methodist revival. In the nation at large appeared a new moral enthusiasm which, rigid and pedantic as it often seemed, was still healthy in its social tone, and whose power was seen in the disappearance of the profligacy which had disgraced the upper classes and the foulness which had infested literature ever since the Restoration. A yet nobler result of the religious revival was the steady attempt, which has never ceased from that day to this, to remedy the guilt, the ignorance, the social degradation of the profligate and poor. It was not until the Wesleyan impulse had done its work that this philanthropic impulse began.

When the Methodists of America met for their great organizing conference, in the city of Baltimore, at Christmas time, in 1784, they asked themselves a very definite question, and they gave a very definite answer. This was the question: "What may we reasonably believe to be God's design in raising up the preachers called Methodists?" And the following was their clear-cut answer: "*To reform the continent and to spread scriptural holiness over these lands.*" Methodism in America, then, consciously and deliberately entered upon a twofold mission: *to reform the continent and to spread scriptural holiness over these lands.* The work of "reform" helps to make scriptural holiness possible; and "scriptural holiness" always brings about reform. Both to the social aspect and to the individualistic aspect of the gospel, Methodism is committed by its essential character and by its history, as well as by the call of God.

The credentials which Jesus presented to John the

Baptist when, distressed with doubts, he sent from his prison to ask, "Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?" these same credentials does the true Church of Christ offer to the world to-day: "Go tell the things which ye have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have glad tidings preached to them."

To the carrying out of Christ's program in the world, both in reference to individual men and women and also as it has to do with the regeneration of human society, we Methodists are solemnly dedicated. Charles Wesley's great hymn, which has been called "The Marseillaise of Methodism," has in view both aspects of Christian service:

A charge to keep I have,  
A God to glorify,  
*A never-dying soul to save,*  
*And fit it for the sky.*

*To serve the present age,*  
*My calling to fulfill,*  
O, may it all my powers engage,  
To do my Master's will.

But something else remains to be said, and it needs to be said very clearly and emphatically; for to err at this point, is to make a fatal error. *The prime object of all Christian philanthropy is the salvation of the soul.* It is the perpetual danger of all who are interested in *reform* that they may lose their interest in individual sufferers and sinners, and that if interested in them as individuals, they come to think more about their bodies than about their souls. With profound insight Isaac Taylor notes that one of the elements of Methodism in the eighteenth century was "evangelic philanthropy." "Evangelic philanthropy," that is a fine phrase and comes at once to the heart of the matter. "The benevolent affections,"



thus he writes, "when kindled and enhanced by Christian motives, take a wide range and prompt Christian men to engage in those enterprises of mercy which have respect more to the religious and moral necessities of their fellows than to their bodily destitution. Those noble charities of these times which are carrying the gospel out through the pagan wilderness, these have their rise in motives that are wholly approvable to the Christian law, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'; for where we lodge Christianity, with its healing influence and its purifying institutions, in the heart of a pagan country, we do that which embraces the purposes of all works of mercy, spiritual and temporal."

All of which is to say that Christian philanthropy is primarily evangelical; it is first of all interested in the gospel, the good tidings of redeeming grace to lost men, the salvation of man's immortal soul.

### III

*The third General Rule gives advice touching spiritual self-culture.*

This Rule, with its suggestive outline, is as follows:

"It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Thirdly, By attending upon all the ordinances of God: such are,

"The public worship of God;

"The ministry of the word, either read or expounded;

"The Supper of the Lord;

"Family and private prayer;

"Searching the Scriptures; and

"Fasting or abstinence."

The phrase which I have used, "spiritual self-culture," may be objected to. Dr. R. W. Dale, for instance, says



that "self-culture, the great law of natural ethics, is unknown in the supernatural life." But immediately he goes on to explain what he means:

Christian holiness is nothing else than a revelation of the inexhaustible holiness of Christ. . . . The Christian man does not simply develop and perfect his own life; he is constantly receiving and appropriating the life and power of the Son of God. . . . Hence the possibilities of the Christian life are not to be measured by our native resources, but by the infinite perfection of Christ himself. We dwell in him; he dwells in us; and he is the living prophecy of the height and glory of our holiness, a prophecy never to be fulfilled on earth or in heaven, but perpetually moving toward fulfillment through struggle and sorrow and frequent defeat in this world and through endless ages of joy and triumph in the world to come.

With these words of the great English theologian we are in heartiest agreement. And in the light of the great truth which they set forth, we call attention to Wesley's insistence upon the importance of making use of the "means of grace."

Note briefly the things mentioned under this third General Rule:

1. "*The public worship of God.*" The soul perishes in solitude. Society is necessary if Christian faith is to grow. In public worship we come together with common sins and sorrows and frailties and hopes and fears and aspirations, and we find our needs supplied. Thus we are knit in a closer bond of brotherhood and our Christian faith grows stronger, while God is glorified.

2. "*The Ministry of the Word, either read or expounded.*" The Word of God, the Holy Bible, has the first place in our Protestant worship. The Bible stands on every Protestant pulpit, and the pulpit stands directly before the people. Our people suffer when the reading of the Bible from the pulpit is neglected. Few things would help so much as a return to a wise and understanding "expounding of the Word."

3. "*The Supper of the Lord.*" This is Christ's holy institution in remembrance of his own death and passion. It perpetually proclaims the fact that his death is the central thing in the gospel. And here still, in the breaking of bread, does the Living Christ make himself known to his followers.

4. "*Family and private prayer.*" The family is the social unit in Christianity. The home is the Church in miniature. The writer of these pages may be pardoned for saying that of all the memories of his childhood none is more sacred, for none made a holier impression on him or had more lasting influence, than those which cluster around the "family altar." O, that the Methodists of this generation would rebuild the altars that have fallen down! And private prayer is necessary if one is to maintain the Christian life. Nothing tells more immediately on Christian character than the neglect of private prayer. A visitor to City Road Chapel, London, goes immediately to Wesley's house. There he is directed to Wesley's "Prayer Room." Opening out of Wesley's bedroom is a little chamber which is a sacred spot indeed. This was Wesley's closet where he shut himself in with God. Methodism was made by such prayers as were offered in this little room. Here the visitor bows his head and prays that he also may know the way to the Source of all power.

5. "*Searching the Scriptures.*" What a book this Bible is! How God does speak through its pages to the soul of man! To the neglect of this book may be traced the fact that so many people are being led astray, blown about by every wind of doctrine. I plead for the study of the Bible, of the Bible itself rather than of books about the Bible.

6. "*Fasting or abstinence.*" Those first Methodists were in earnest. Indeed, Methodism has been described as being "Christianity in earnest." And no one will deny that nowadays we need less feasting and more fasting,

less self-indulgence and more self-sacrifice. So shall we draw nigh to God and so will God draw nigh to us.

Some one has said that one of the gravest dangers the Church confronts to-day is the danger of "practical efficiency and spiritual shallowness." And I fear that the saying is true. We have developed a wonderful machine. The things that any well-trained and efficient business man can do, we have all learned to do fairly well. But where are those who can do what "practical efficiency" can never accomplish? We have been so busy with "much serving," that we have not taken time to "sit at Jesus's feet." And we are the poorer, and the whole Church suffers. A young man visiting a distant city for the first time was much impressed when, in passing a great electrical plant, he read this sign: "Power to Let." Here was a great power house from which wires ran in all directions sending power out to the surrounding country. There is a great central Power House for the human soul. Here power is to let. Here the soul comes in touch with God. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you." And by use of the means of grace, as suggested in our General Rules, one will put one's self in touch with that Power without which all our efforts will accomplish little and our own souls grow yet more poverty-stricken even while we try in vain to accomplish the great task of saving the world.

Here, then, in the General Rules, we have one of the most important fundamentals of Methodism. What a pity it would be if Methodists, having received such an inheritance from that man "sent from God whose name was John"—John Wesley—should now join in with those who sound a false note in Methodism, the emphasis on a creed to be signed rather than on a life in Christ to be lived.

Let Methodists learn again what Methodism is and come back to those great ethical and spiritual principles



which have made Methodism the mightiest spiritual force in America!

How important Methodism believes these General Rules to be is evident when one turns to the Book of Discipline. Our fathers saw to it that the General Rules were protected by the constitution of the Church. They cannot be "revoked or changed" by a majority vote of the General Conference, but only by regular constitutional process. And this is as it should be. For this great historic document, from the hand of John Wesley, should for all times stand in the Book of Discipline just as we have it now. Furthermore, the importance, from a Methodist viewpoint, of this outline of Christian duty is seen from the fact that under the "duties of the preacher in charge of a circuit, station, or mission," this is given among the things required: "To see that in every congregation the General Rules are read at least once a year." And the law of the Church does not let it rest at that, but requires the presiding elder at each third Quarterly Conference to ask the question: "Have the General Rules been read?"

In conclusion, I express the opinion that few things would be of greater service to our people than for every Methodist preacher who reads this to go into his pulpit at an early date with Discipline in hand, and, in the spirit of Christ, give to his congregation an explanation and exposition of the General Rules. For Methodist discipline is as truly a part of Methodism as is Methodist doctrine.



III

FUNDAMENTAL EXPERIENCE

AND THE COMPLEMENT OF DOCTRINES WHICH CAME OUT  
OF THAT EXPERIENCE



### III

## FUNDAMENTAL EXPERIENCE

I PURPOSE writing in the present chapter about that gracious experience of personal salvation out of which Methodism originally sprang and to which Methodism bears witness the world over. I am doing this because of the joy I have in bearing testimony to my own faith and in order to draw the thought of my brethren back to the viewpoint of Wesley and the early Methodists. For the most essential thing in Methodism is a personal experience of salvation. To preach the great doctrines of personal experience and to bear glad testimony to salvation from sin—it was for this that God raised up the Methodists.

Let no one suppose that we Methodists are indifferent to matters touching fundamental orthodoxy. Throughout all our history the trumpet we have sounded has given forth no uncertain sound. However, our Methodist way of approaching the whole matter of orthodoxy has from the very beginning been quite different from that usually followed. The unusual method of those who “contend for the faith” has been to write down intellectual propositions, to draw up long articles of belief, and by threat of excommunication insist that they must be accepted. This method of intellectualism Methodism has never followed. The historic position of Methodism is not that you make men Christians by first making them orthodox, but that if you can succeed in getting people converted and can lead them on to deeper experiences of divine grace, you will keep them sound in the faith.

And the things I am saying to the Church are said because I am interested in keeping Methodism true to her early experience and her apostolic testimony. I do not believe that this can be done by dogmatism and denun-

ciation. I know that it can be done by calling sinners to repentance, by living a Christian life, and by exhorting our people to go on to perfection.

This is the position of the fathers and founders of our great Church. Take a quotation from Dr. Abel Stevens:

Methodism reversed the usual policy of religious sects which seek to preserve their spiritual life by their orthodoxy. It maintained its orthodoxy by its spiritual life, and it presents to the theological world the anomalous spectacle of a widespread Church which for more than a hundred years has had no serious disturbance from heresy. Wesley seems to have perceived that unnecessary discriminative theological requirements of opinions are the most effectual means of provoking heterodoxy into existence by challenging the doubts or curiosity of speculative minds, that the continual scenting out of heresy by the Church is the surest means of producing it, as the persecution of doubtful opinions has usually strengthened and spread them. ("History of Methodism," Vol. II, page 445.)

Take also a quotation from our own Bishop Holland N. McTyeire:

The concrete doctrine, as embodied and illustrated in experience, is of at least equal practical importance with the abstract doctrine, as stated in books. Methodism puts emphasis on experience. St. Paul more than once told how he was converted. The subjective aspects of Christianity, as presented in his Epistles, are as striking as the objective. Experimental religion is not a cant phrase; it expresses a real and a great fact. It has been well said: Methodism reversed the usual policy of religious sects, which seek to sustain their religious life by their orthodoxy; it has sustained its orthodoxy by devoting its chief care to its spiritual life, and for more than a century had no serious outbreaks of heresy, notwithstanding the masses of untrained minds gathered within its pale and the general lack of preparatory education among its clergy. No other modern religious body presents a parallel to it in this respect. ("History of Methodism," page 123.)

Let us recall, then, that epoch-making experience out of which came Methodism. Many circumstances had led up to that hour in Wesley's experience. The influences of the



parsonage at Epworth, the life spent at Oxford, the humbling and chastening effect of his experience in Georgia—all these brought him to that culminating hour. In language which has become classic in Methodist circles Wesley describes what happened at the prayer meeting in Aldersgate Street:

About a quarter before nine, while one was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. I began to pray with all my might for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart.

John Wesley was not alone in this experience. Whitefield had entered into a conscious experience of divine grace. Charles Wesley had also found the peace and joy which come from personal trust in Christ. Presently numbers of others had found the “pearl of great price.” And in a little while there came from God the greatest revival of evangelical religion the world had ever seen. Out of this came Methodism and the Methodist Church.

Methodism, then, is emphatically the religion of Christian experience. As everybody knows, among the doctrinal standards of Methodism are reckoned Wesley’s “Notes on the New Testament” and Wesley’s “Standard Sermons,” these all written to explain and expound the doctrines of Christian experience. What, then, are the doctrines of Christian experience which from the first have been considered of central importance in Methodism? They are the following: 1. The Universality of the Atonement, 2. Salvation through Faith in Jesus Christ, 3. The Witness of the Spirit, and 4. The Possibility of Christian Perfection.

Consider briefly these cardinal doctrines of Methodism, these gracious truths of Christian experience;

*I. The Universality of the Atonement.*

From his college days Wesley had believed in the universality of the atonement. He held to the faith which he had received from his wise mother that "the doctrine of predestination as maintained by the rigid Calvinists is very shocking and ought to be abhorred because it directly charges the most high God with being the author of sin." But in the glowing experience of Wesley and those associated with him this truth that Christ died for all men took fire. It became something more than a doctrine handed down from the fathers and held by the intellect as a truth made necessary by the character of God. It became a fact of experience. They themselves had been redeemed. The worst men that they knew were being saved by the power of Christ. None were so lost but Christ could find them and bring them back to the Father's house. And so, to quote Green: "Their voice was soon heard in the wildest and most barbarous corners of the land, among the bleak moors of Northumberland, in the dens of London, or in the long galleries where in the pauses of his labors the Cornish miner listens to the sobbing of the sea."

And it was not long before revival fires were kindled on this side of the Atlantic. What Wesley and his associates did in England Francis Asbury and his coadjutors did here in the wilds of America. And they did even more, for their hardships were incomparably greater. Among all those early heroes, Jesse Lee, of Virginia, stands out as easily one of the first. It was he who carried the gospel of Methodism into Calvinistic New England. They would not let him preach his Methodist "heresy" of the love of God to all mankind in their churches. So, like Wesley before him, he took to the open fields. When he came to Boston, he found a table, and, placing it under an elm tree, he began to sing:

Come, sinners, to the gospel feast;  
Let every soul be Jesus' guest;  
Ye need not one be left behind,  
For God hath bidden all mankind.

Sent by my Lord, on you I call;  
The invitation is to all:  
Come, all the world! come, sinner, thou!  
All things in Christ are ready now.

This is the gospel which did more than any other one thing to lay the foundations of Christian civilization in this New World. It is a blessed gospel we preach, and a glorious inheritance of faith and heroic service is ours. But what does it all amount to if we do not do our utmost and our best to follow in the steps of our fathers and give the gospel to the lost men and women of our cities, our towns, and our rural districts? The compulsion of a great message is upon us. We must be missionary or we are not Methodists.

God pity us if, sent as we are upon a great mission, we fall out among ourselves by the way and take to disputing about things which are not essential to the gospel and have no relation to the great facts of Christian experience and life!

## *II. Salvation through Faith in Jesus Christ.*

All his life long, until he felt his heart "strangely warmed," Wesley had been on the wrong track. He had tried almost everything—sacramentarianism, asceticism, reliance on good works—and all in vain. His experience in Aldersgate Street changed all that. Then and there he discovered for himself what it was to trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation. And this is how Wesley describes the faith that saves:

It is not an opinion, or any number of opinions put together, be they ever so true. A string of opinions is no more Christian faith than a string of beads is Christian holiness. The faith by



which the promise is attained is a power wrought by the Almighty in an immortal spirit inhabiting a house of clay to see through that veil into the world of spirits into things invisible and eternal. . . . It is the *ear* of the soul whereby the sinner hears the voice of the Son of God and lives, the *palate* of the soul (if the expression may be allowed) whereby the believer "tastes the good word of God and the powers of the world to come," the *feeling* of the soul whereby "through the power of the Highest overshadowing him" he perceives the presence of Him in whom he lives and moves and has his being and feels the love of God shed abroad in his heart. It is the internal evidence of Christianity, a perpetual revelation, equally strong, equally new, through all the centuries which have elapsed since the incarnation and passing now, even as it has done from the beginning, directly from God into the believing soul.

Concerning this description of faith, Coleridge is quoted as saying: "I venture to avow it as my conviction that either Christian faith is what Wesley here describes or there is no proper meaning in the word."

Let us rejoice that there are many of us who know from personal experience that "a string of opinions is no more Christian faith than a string of beads is Christian holiness." We have found out for ourselves that saving faith is an intensely personal affair. It is a relation between souls, between my soul and the living Christ. It is like forming a new friendship. It is like falling in love. We have formed a new friendship with him who is the sinner's Friend. We have fallen in love with him who loved us and gave himself up for us. The trust we have in him is like the trust a child has in his father.

My exhortation to all Methodists who have entered into the experience described above is this: Do not let the clamor of confused and confusing voices make you timid or afraid. If you have come in touch with reality, if you have learned to distinguish the things that differ, the essential from the nonessential, then tell it out to all the world. Speak out the things which you have found out for yourself. Dare to be a witness to the reality and power



of that living faith which never mistakes the husk for the kernel and which never confuses the changing form with the abiding reality.

### *III. The Witness of the Spirit.*

Possibly more than any other Christian denomination has Methodism preached this doctrine. God has enabled Methodism through all these years to testify with St. Paul: "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." Methodists around the world unite in singing:

My God is reconciled;  
His pardoning voice I hear;  
He owns me for his child,  
I can no longer fear:  
With confidence I now draw nigh  
And, "Father, Abba, Father," cry.

What gave special form and expression to this doctrine was the deistic philosophy which was prevalent in the eighteenth century and the personal experience of Wesley and the people called Methodists in reaction against that form of skepticism.

Deism was the doctrine of an absentee God. It taught that God had once done something, but that he could not do anything any more. He had once created the world and ordained certain laws. Then he had left the world to the running of these laws just as a watchmaker, to use the favorite illustration of the eighteenth century, might make a watch and wind it up to run of itself. God was not present in history; there could be no such thing as personal providence over human lives; there could not possibly be any such thing as revelation, since God could not speak to men; God could not come in touch with the human soul; men could not possibly have present and personal knowl-

edge of God. God had given men the light of human reason. By this light they could discover that God exists, that he had ordained certain laws of morality, and that the soul is immortal. That was enough; man needed no more. Such, in brief, was the philosophy of the eighteenth century. And it was everywhere triumphant; practically all preachers and teachers had come under the influence of it. It weighed heavily upon them like the pressure of the atmosphere. They could not escape from it. And I may add that this is the philosophy of many people to-day. Indeed, in some of its forms it still passes itself off as orthodox theology. Religion in Wesley's century was, therefore, a cold and dead affair. It had neither life nor enthusiasm in it.

On the intellectual side Bishop Butler did a work without parallel when he wrote his "Analogy." It is a mistake to underestimate the influence of that notable book on the religious and philosophical thought of the century. But it is simple truth to say that it was not Butler's "Analogy" and the writings of other thinkers that destroyed deism. It was the Methodist revival that did the work. It was not *reason* that overturned that philosophical system; it was *experience*. Deism was silent in the face of the facts of Christian experience. The answer of Methodism to the doubts and denials of the deists was just this: God is not absent, but present. Here he is now moving mightily in the hearts and lives of men and working powerfully in human society. God does speak to men, for God has spoken to us. "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Methodism was a movement that came from God; it was a gracious dispensation of Divine Providence; it was an invasion out of the other world. When one reads Wesley's Journal, one finds himself in the atmosphere of the New Testament. The supernatural was revealed in the hearts of men and before their very eyes.

*IV. The Possibility of Christian Perfection.<sup>1</sup>*

We will let John Wesley say exactly what Methodism means by this doctrine. He writes: "I mean loving God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourselves. I pin all its opposers to this definition. No evasion. No shifting the question." A short while before he died Wesley said: "This doctrine of full salvation is the grand *depositum* which God has lodged with the people called Methodists, and for the sake of propagating this chiefly he appears to have raised them up."

Now, as everybody knows, this doctrine has been the cause of much difference of opinion among Methodists. In recent years it came near creating a schism in the Church. In consequence one seldom hears "entire sanctification" mentioned from our pulpits nowadays. It is my own opinion that the time has now come when, with the heat of controversy behind us, in the light of New Testament teaching, and with the assistance of a more adequate psychology than our fathers had, we are prepared to restate our great teaching concerning the possibility of Christian perfection and to proclaim it everywhere.

That the New Testament teaches a doctrine of perfect love is as clear as anything can be. That the early Methodists taught such a doctrine and that through their preaching many men and women were lifted from the lowlands to the sunlit plains is also as certain as anything can be. It is believed that in the light of modern psychology the doctrine of Christian perfection can find a restatement which will commend it to all thoughtful and aspiring souls. Our present-day psychologists have much to say about "the divided self" and "the unified per-

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<sup>1</sup> For further study, see "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," by John Wesley; and that Methodist classic, "The Tongue of Fire," by William Arthur, saint and scholar.



sonality.” Now, the end of all religion and of all Christian education, so far as personal salvation is concerned, is to enable one to say: “This one thing I do; this one thing I am.” This process of unification begins in *regeneration*. *Perfect love* completes it. What our modern psychologists mean by “the unification of the personality,” exactly *that* Wesley meant by *Christian perfection*, and exactly this the New Testament means also. Here, then, is a consummation to be sought after. Here is an attainment to be reached this side of death. For so far as the teachings of the New Testament guide us and so far as experience leads us there is no reason why, as a result of full consecration and perfect faith, one may not attain it in one supreme and glorious moment.

It is interesting to know that Wesley did not himself profess it. To one who had objected to the doctrine, Mr. Wesley wrote: “I tell you flat, I have not attained the character I draw.” The nearest he is known to have come to professing it was when to the question whether he had ever experienced the blessing of perfect love he replied by quoting Charles Wesley’s hymn:

Jesus, confirm my heart’s desire,  
To work, and speak, and think, for thee;  
Still let me guard the holy fire,  
And still stir up thy gift in me;

Ready for all thy perfect will,  
My acts of faith and love repeat,  
Till death thy endless mercies seal,  
And make the sacrifice complete.

If the present writer be asked, “What have you to say concerning your own experience?” I reply: “Not as though I had already attained, . . . but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ



Jesus." And I will add this also: In the providence of God he broke me in pieces like a potter's vessel and made "another vessel as seemed good to the potter to make it." Temptations which once were fierce are fierce no longer. Certain battles which once occupied a great part of the field of life have now passed to a large degree out of sight, having rolled on down beneath the horizon where sometimes I hear the distant sound of artillery and the retreating steps of a defeated foe. There have come to me a deeper appreciation of the things that really matter and a large indifference to things, whether of creed or of practice, that make no difference to the Christian life. A deep and abiding sense of certainty touching the things of the spirit has brought me a peace which once I did not have. I am ashamed beyond measure that my Christian experience is still so poor and my attainments in divine grace so small. But I am able to make Andrew Rykman's prayer my own:

Other lips may well be bold;  
Like the publican of old,  
I can only urge the plea:  
"Lord, be merciful to me."

. . . . .  
If I may not, sin-defiled,  
Claim my birthright as a child,  
Suffer it that I to thee  
As an hired servant be;  
Let the lowliest task be mine,  
Grateful, so the work be thine;  
Let me find the humblest place  
In the shadow of thy grace:  
Blest to me were any spot  
Where temptation whispers not.  
If there be some weaker one,  
Give me strength to help him on;  
If a blinder soul there be,  
Let me guide him nearer thee.  
Make my mortal dreams come true  
With the work I fain would do;

Clothe with life the weak intent;  
Let me be the thing I meant;  
Let me find in thy employ  
Peace that dearer is than joy;  
Out of self to love be led  
And to heaven acclimated,  
Until all things sweet and good  
Seem my natural habitude.

### CONCLUSION.

The most fundamental thing about Methodism, then, is a gracious experience of personal salvation. Nothing would mean more to our Church just now, and I think also to the kingdom of God, than a fresh study of our own doctrines and a fresh quickening of our own Christian experience. Let our beloved Methodism come back to the experience and practice of the fathers. Well does Dr. Stevens say in connection with the great passage already quoted from his "History of Methodism," "In this respect"—in respect to Methodism's insistence on experience and a holy life rather than on "theological requirements"—"Methodism may have a special mission in the religious world and for the ages to come."

And this, I am sure, is the call of God to Methodism at this very hour. My own belief is that Methodism has come to the kingdom for such a time as this. And I express the grave fear that if this present unfortunate agitation concerning orthodoxy and heresy continues, in which laymen often try to settle theological questions that have puzzled scholars for centuries and preachers think to silence the scientists while themselves knowing nothing about the matters they discuss and scientists who know little about the Bible and nothing about philosophy join in and add confusion to disorder—I say I am greatly afraid that if something is not done to stop this agitation multitudes will be driven into the camp of the extreme "liberals," and some may be driven into actual infidelity.

And I am sure that if we Methodists will learn from our own standards and our own Methodist historians just what Methodism is and will stand true to original Methodism the present hour offers the greatest opportunity that ever came to us in our entire history. In this respect Methodism has a special mission in the religious world to-day and for the ages to come.

| My final exhortation is this: Preach and teach the great affirmations of the faith. Sound out always a positive note. Do not try so much to defend the gospel. Proclaim it. Proclaim the gospel, and the Holy Spirit will defend it. This was St. Paul's method: "By the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." When the truth is proclaimed, it takes hold of the conscience of every sort of man.

*The Methodist gospel of Christian experience is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is ample for all men, large enough to meet the needs of all who sin and suffer and wander and die.*





IV

ADDENDA

APOSTLES' CREED, ARTICLES OF RELIGION, AND THE  
GENERAL RULES





IV  
ADDENDA

THE APOSTLES' CREED<sup>1</sup>

I believe

I. 1. In God the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth; and

II. 2. In Jesus Christ  
His only Son our Lord,  
Who

3. Was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
Born of the Virgin Mary,

4. Suffered under Pontius Pilate,

5. Was crucified, dead, and buried,  
He descended into hell;<sup>2</sup>

6. The third day he rose again from the dead,

7. He ascended into heaven, and  
sitteth on the right hand of God the Father  
Almighty;

8. From thence he shall come to judge the quick and  
the dead.

I believe

III. 9. In the Holy Ghost;

10. The holy catholic Church;  
The communion of saints;

11. The forgiveness of sins;

12. The resurrection of the body, and  
the life everlasting. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup>The arrangement given here is taken from "The Historic Faith," by Westcott. It presents immediately to the eye the several articles in this great creed.

<sup>2</sup>This article was omitted by the American Methodists in 1786.

## ARTICLES OF RELIGION

*I. Of Faith in the Holy Trinity.*

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker and Preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead, there are three persons of one substance, power, and eternity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

*II. Of the Word, or Son of God, who was made very Man.*

The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and manhood, were joined together in one person, never to be divided, whereof is one Christ, very God and very man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for actual sins of men.

*III. Of the Resurrection of Christ.*

Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day.

*IV. Of the Holy Ghost.*

The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory, with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

*V. Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation.*

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought

requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture, we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.

*Of the Names of the Canonical Books.*—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, The First Book of Samuel, The Second Book of Samuel, The First Book of Kings, The Second Book of Kings, The First Book of Chronicles, The Second Book of Chronicles, The Book of Ezra, The Book of Nehemiah, The Book of Esther, The Book of Job, The Psalms, The Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher, Cantica, or Songs of Solomon, Four Prophets the greater, Twelve Prophets the less.

All the Books of the New Testament, as they are commonly received, we do receive and account canonical.

## *VI. Of the Old Testament.*

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, who feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the law given from God by Moses, as touching ceremonies and rites, doth not bind Christians, nor ought the civil precepts thereof of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet, notwithstanding, no Christian whatsoever is free from the obedience of the commandments which are called moral.

## *VII. Of Original or Birth Sin.*

Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone



from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.

#### *VIII. Of Free Will.*

The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such, that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and works to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

#### *IX. Of the Justification of Man.*

We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings; wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.

#### *X. Of Good Works.*

Although good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known, as a tree discerned by its fruit.

#### *XI. Of Works of Supererogation.*

Voluntary works, besides, over and above God's commandments, which they call works of supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety. For by them men do declare, That they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for his sake than of bounden duty is required: whereas Christ saith plainly, When ye have done all that is commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants.

*XII. Of Sin after Justification.*

Not every sin, willingly committed after justification, is the sin against the Holy Ghost, and unpardonable. Wherefore the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after justification: after we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God rise again, and amend our lives. And therefore they are to be condemned who say they can no more sin as long as they live here, or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.

*XIII. Of the Church.*

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

*XIV. Of Purgatory.*

The Romish doctrine concerning purgatory, pardons, worshipping, and adoration, as well of images as of relics, and also invocation of saints, is a fond thing vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrant of Scripture, but repugnant to the word of God.

*XV. Of speaking in the Congregation in such a Tongue as the People understand.*

It is a thing plainly repugnant to the word of God, and the custom of the Primitive Church, to have public prayer in the Church, or to minister the sacraments in a tongue not understood by the people.

*XVI. Of the Sacraments.*

Sacraments ordained of Christ, are not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession; but rather they

are certain signs of grace, and God's good will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in him.

There are two sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.

Those five commonly called sacraments; that is to say, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and extreme Unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have partly grown out of the corrupt following of the apostles, and partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures, but yet have not the like nature of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, because they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God.

The sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about; but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same, they have a wholesome effect or operation; but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves condemnation, as St. Paul saith.

### *XVII. Of Baptism.*

Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration, or the new birth. The baptism of young children is to be retained in the Church.

### *XVIII. Of the Lord's Supper.*

The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another, but rather is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death: insomuch, that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which



we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ.

Transubstantiation, or the change of the substance of bread and wine in the Supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ; but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.

The body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the mean whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper, is faith.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped.

#### *XIX. Of both Kinds.*

The cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the lay-people; for both the parts of the Lord's Supper, by Christ's ordinance and commandment, ought to be administered to all Christians alike.

#### *XX. Of the One Oblation of Christ, finished upon the Cross.*

The offering of Christ once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone. Wherefore, the sacrifice of masses, in the which it is commonly said that the priest doth offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, is a blasphemous fable, and dangerous deceit.

#### *XXI. Of the Marriage of Ministers.*

The ministers of Christ are not commanded by God's law either to vow the estate of single life, or to abstain from marriage; therefore it is lawful for them, as for all other Christians, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve best to godliness.



*XXII. Of the Rites and Ceremonies of Churches.*

It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike; for they have been always different, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's word. Whosoever, through his private judgment, willingly and purposely doth openly break the rites and ceremonies of the Church to which he belongs, which are not repugnant to the word of God, and are ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, that others may fear to do the like, as one that offendeth against the common order of the Church, and woundeth the consciences of weak brethren.

Every particular Church may ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies, so that all things may be done to edification.

*XXIII. Of the Rulers of the United States of America.*

The president, the congress, the general assemblies, the governors, and the councils of state, *as the delegates of the people*, are the rulers of the United States of America, according to the division of power made to them by the constitution of the United States, and by the constitutions of their respective states. And the said states are a sovereign and independent nation, and ought not to be subject to any foreign jurisdiction.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The Twenty-Third Article of Religion in the Disciplines of all our Churches in foreign lands shall read:

*"XXIII. Of the Duty of Christians to the Civil Authority.*

*"It is the duty of all Christians, and especially of all Christian ministers, to observe and obey the laws and commands of the governing or supreme authority of the country of which they are citizens or subjects, or in which they reside, and to use all laudable means to encourage and enjoin obedience to the powers that be,"*

*XXIV. Of Christian Men's Goods.*

The riches and goods of Christians are not common as touching the right, title, and possession of the same, as some do falsely boast. Notwithstanding, every man ought, of such things as he possesseth, liberally to give alms to the poor according to his ability.

*XXV. Of a Christian Man's Oath.*

As we confess that vain and rash swearing is forbidden Christian men by our Lord Jesus Christ and James his apostle; so we judge that the Christian religion doth not prohibit, but that a man may swear when the magistrate requireth, in a cause of faith and charity, so it be done according to the prophet's teaching, in justice, judgment, and truth.

## THE GENERAL RULES.

There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies, a "desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." But wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits.

It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

First, By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced: such as,

The taking of the name of God in vain;

The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein, or by buying or selling;

Drunkenness, or drinking spirituous liquors unless in cases of necessity;

*Fighting*, quarreling, brawling; brother *going to law* with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the *using many words* in buying or selling;

The *buying or selling goods that have not paid the duty*;  
 The *giving or taking things on usury, i. e., unlawful interest*;

*Uncharitable or unprofitable* conversation, particularly speaking evil of magistrates or ministers;

Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us;

Doing what we know is not for the glory of God: as,

The *putting on of gold and costly apparel*;

The *taking such diversions* as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus;

The *singing those songs, or reading those books*, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God;

Softness or needless self-indulgence;

Laying up treasures upon earth;

Borrowing without a probability of paying, or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Secondly, By doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men:

To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison;

To their souls, by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine that "we are not to do good unless *our hearts be free* to it."

By doing good, especially to them that are of the household of faith, or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others, buying one of another, helping each other in business; and so much the more because the world will love its own, and them *only*.

By all possible *diligence and frugality*, that the gospel be not blamed.



By running with patience the race which is set before them, *denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily*; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say *all manner of evil of them falsely for the Lord's sake*.

It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Thirdly, By attending upon all the ordinances of God: such are,

The public worship of God;

The ministry of the word, either read or expounded;

The Supper of the Lord;

Family and private prayer;

Searching the Scriptures; and

Fasting or abstinence.

These are the General Rules of our societies; all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. *And all these we know his Spirit writes on truly awakened hearts*. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be known unto them who watch over that soul, as they who must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways; we will bear with him for a season; but if then he repent not, he hath no more place among us; we have delivered our own souls.



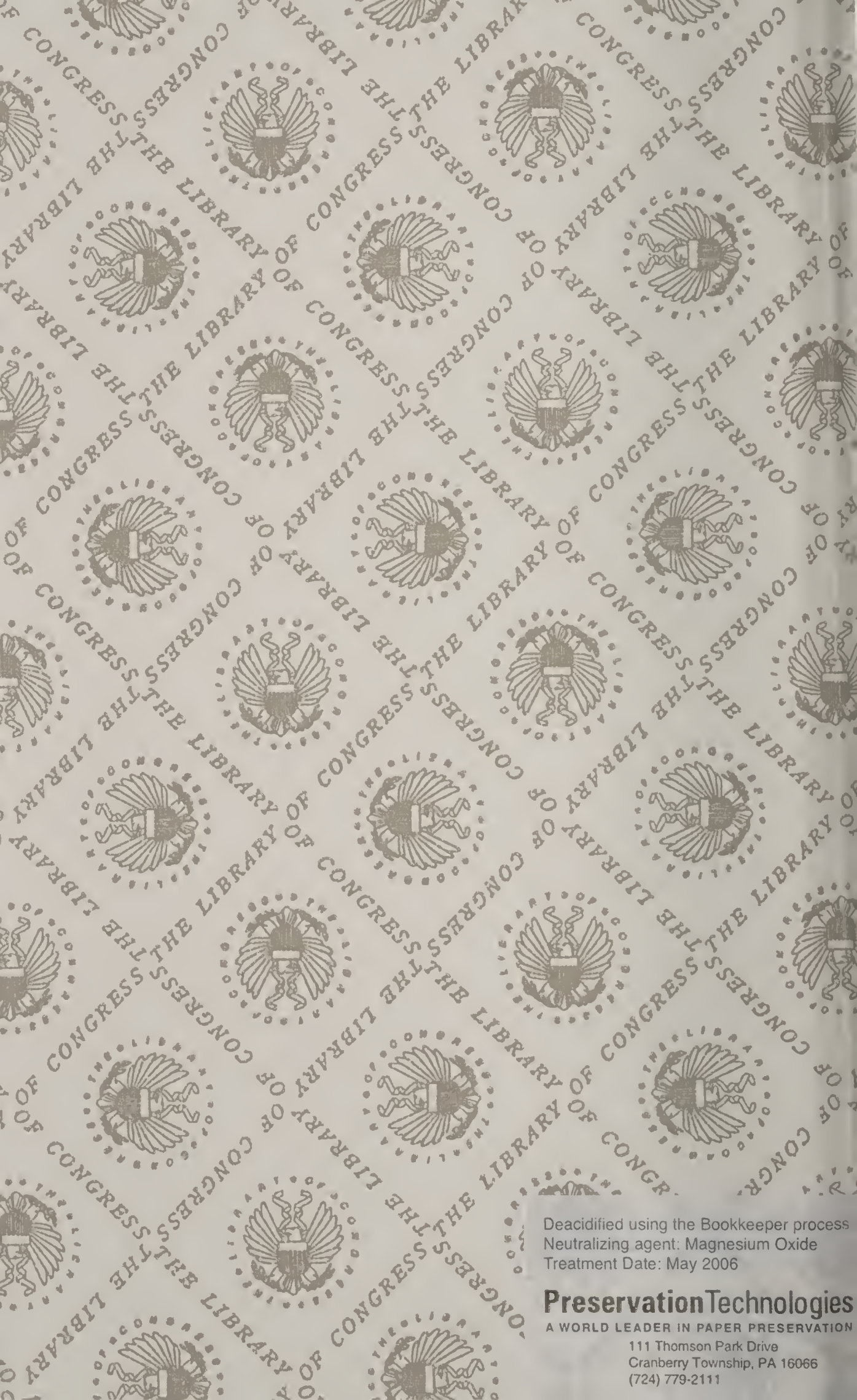
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